Valmont Butte Cleanup

Last Updated Thursday, 13 September 2007

What's New

- Weekly Information Packet to City Council dated Thursday, Sept. 13, 2007 - Update on Valmont Butte Property and Training Center

Site Remediation

The city is pursuing site remediation for the Valmont Butte site per the covenant agreement between the city and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE).

Facilities and Asset Management (FAM) will serve as the project manager for all phases of the project. Site remediation is proposed in a three-phase project.

Phase I work, which included the removal of hazardous of potentially hazardous materials stored on the site, has been completed at an approximate cost of $169,000. Phases II and III involve removing prairie dogs currently living in the area and and capping the tailings ponds. Staff is following the city's Urban Wildlife Management Plan (UWMP) and city ordinance protocol in relocating all of the prairie dogs on the site (outside of the cap), this work is currently underway.

The total estimated cost for remediation of the site is $913,000. Approximately $169,000 of this amount has been spent removing hazardous waste (Phase I), $34,000 has been spent to date on wildlife assessments and relocation (Phase II) and $27,000 has been spent on cap restoration design (Phase III). The remaining Phase II and Phase III work will cost approximately $683,000. The original budget amount for the project was established in February 2006 at $850,000.

Specific Information on Remediation Phases

Phase1: Remove hazardous materials located outside the tailing ponds in the form of storage drums, PCB transformers, contaminated and radioactive soils, and miscellaneous items. These items were identified as hazardous materials in need of removal. Staff has contracted with Terracon to develop a scope of work for the removal of the materials and monitoring the work. Staff intends to issue a Request for Qualifications based on the work scope developed by Terracon and select an environmental waste management contractor to perform the work. A specific health and safety plan will be required for this phase of the project. Radioactive and contaminated soils located outside the tailing pond areas will be moved to the primary tailing pond area and will be properly covered as part of the cap restoration work. Other hazardous materials will be removed from the site and properly disposed.

* Specifications for this work are available for public viewing at the reference desk of the Boulder Public Library under "Public Review," 1000 Canyon Boulevard. The name of the publication is: City of Boulder Hazardous and Industrial Waste Removal and Disposal, Valmont Butte/Allied Piles Site, Boulder, Colorado, Specifications.

Phase 2: Inventory, sample and remove approximately 700 prairie dogs from the primary and secondary tailings ponds areas as required by the covenant agreement with CDPHE. In addition, a barrier to prevent prairie dogs and other burrowing animals from entering the area will be constructed. The city has contracted with Roe Ecological Services to assist in this effort.

Phase 3: After the prairie dogs are removed and the barrier is constructed, restore the tailings ponds caps as required by the covenant agreement with CDPHE. The tailing ponds were originally covered by a cap consisting of a layer of inert clean fill material. This cap has eroded and has been disturbed by prairie dogs and needs to be restored.

Prairie Dogs on Valmont Butte

In January and February 2006, tissue samples were collected from Valmont Butte prairie dogs and soil samples were taken from the area. The samples were tested to find out if the prairie dogs carried harmful levels of uranium, arsenic and lead from burrowing in and around the tailings ponds. The concern was that if relocated, the prairie dogs may create health problems in the food chain.

The levels found in the soil samples and in the soil buried externally in the prairie dog pelts were elevated, as anticipated. The city's tests of soil samples and radiation levels were consistent with the EPA's 2005 soil testing. However, the tests on internal prairie dog tissues (liver and muscle tissue) found that the levels of these substances were minimal within the prairie dogs themselves. The prairie dogs were deemed safe for the food chain, and the CDPHE has authorized their relocation off site if relocation sites are available.

The prairie dogs must be removed from the tailings ponds areas and a barrier to prevent their return must be in place before the majority of remediation on the site can occur. The prairie dog removal process is expected to commence in 2007 as noted in the city's Urban Wildlife Management Plan (accepted by City Council on August 29, 2006). This timeline will also enable the Trust for Public Lands, who has expressed interest in purchasing the site, time to secure grant money for some site remediation.

When removing prairie dogs, all city requirements will be met, and all reasonable efforts to relocate the prairie dogs will be explored. If a relocation site is found, the city will relocate all of the prairie dogs. If a relocation site cannot be found, lethal control will only be used on the prairie dogs that currently inhabit the tailings ponds (estimated to be at least 325); the prairie dogs outside of the tailings ponds would not be lethally controlled. A barrier will be put in place to try to keep the rest of the prairie dogs from infiltrating the tailings ponds again so that the city does not have to continue to relocate or lethally control them.

Prior to removing the prairie dogs, the city will provide a public announcement of its removal plans and solicit information on potential relocation receiving sites. If members of the public have state-certified relocation sites to offer, they may submit information about the name, location and landowner during that waiting period. The city, however, welcomes and encourages input on potential receiving sites at any time and as early as possible to help avoid the potential future use of lethal control at the site.

Previous Meetings:

A Valmont Butte Study Session was held with City Council on Tuesday, Jan. 30 and Council provided the following

general guidance regarding the sale of the property:

- Council wants to proceed with a purchase option from Trust for Public Land (TPL) for approximately 71 acres;

- Council wants to know what the purchase price of the property will be, including and excluding the mill site from the sale.

- Council indicated support for landmarking the mill site, but wants to know what cost-impact this will have on the sale price.

- Council was not supportive of having the mill become operational again.

- If other potential buyers are interested in the property, Council indicated that these buyers should be referred to TPL.

View the Community Environmental Assesment Process (CEAP) report.

Past Documentation:

- July 6, 2006 Information Item to City Council 15.96 Kb

- EPA Site Assessment Results

- May 8, 2006 State of Colorado letter 20.68 Kb - response on prairie dogs

- May 2, 2006 Roe Ecological Services, LLC 105.70 Kb - proposal for prairie dogs

- May 4, 2006 State of Colorado letter 21.21 Kb - response on cleanup plans

- April 21, 2006 Terracon Consulting letter 23.80 Kb - proposal for cleanup plan

- Feb. 2006 State Proposal (62.78 KB)

- Feb. 2006 Terracon Proposal (255.14 KB)

- Agreements and Declaration of Covenants (575.32 KB)

- Feb. 2006 Prairie Dog Control Permit (127.66 KB)

- Valmont Butte Security

- Staff Contact List

Unique grasshopper study at Valmont Butte

In cooperation with the city and Trust for Public Lands (TPL), researchers from the CU Natural History Museum will survey the Valmont Butte property, from mid-March to August, to examine the effects of global climate change on the grasshoppers of the Front Range. This is a follow-up effort to a similar survey done on Valmont Butte in the late 1950s. "Valmont Butte is of special interest because it has experienced the greatest change in climate and thus it should provide us with the greatest measurable changes in grasshopper diversity, phenology (timing of events) and morphology (as grasshopper size responds quickly to changes in temperature)," said Dr. Cesar Nufio with the museum.

For further information, please contact Bill Boyes, Facilities & Fleet Manager, at (303) 441-4125 or e-mail to boyesb@bouldercolorado.gov